

Dear Stronach Family:

November has been an intense month, as my time doing fieldwork in Easter Island for my thesis research had been. Antonia and I spent the entire month in Easter Island working with what currently amounts to twelve people. This first stage of the project has been focused in gathering as much video material as we can, as well as to begin to ground the concept of the project (see October letter). A certain dynamic emerged whereby in explaining to the people involved what the concept of the project is, they were able to show me limitations that I had not thought about. As many of my collaborators often tell me, many outsiders (particularly researchers) come to Easter Island with a false sense of authority over the island's past. Rather than replicating a conceptual structure of my own figment, as a result of this general criticism, I decided to adopt listening as a mode of work. Rather than imposing themes and logics into the narratives that my collaborators tell me, I have presented the project to them as an open media space where they can share what *they* think is most important to share. My intention is still to use the concept I developed, but to mold it to the material I gather, rather than vice versa.

Part of the methodology I am developing, therefore, involves working within the limits of local cultural norms. Throughout my fieldwork in the island these past years, I had already become aware of how, for instance, required human subject consent forms paradoxically work against easing the relationship between researcher and subject. A more trustworthy sign of building an honest relationship with a Rapanui person is to share food and thoughts, rather than signatures. So one of the first steps I took upon starting my work in Easter Island was to prepare an *umu tahu*, which involves cooking a white-feathered rooster in a traditional earth oven accompanied by one sweet potato, wrapping it in banana leaves, and offering it to an elderly person whom one respects.



Figure 1. A photo of the *umu tahu* we offered to Niso Tuki. Photo taken by Pablo Seward. Easter Island, November 12, 2014.

An important aspect of performing an *umu tahu* nowadays is to do it without the mediation of money. I was extremely fortunate, as the person who is hosting us had a white rooster who he was willing to give us if we helped him with some farm work the next day. With his help, Antonia and I removed the rooster's feathers, cooked it in the earth oven, and brought the finished product to Niso Tuki, a highly respected elder with whom at that point we had already starting working.



Figure 2. Pablo removing the rooster's feathers.
Photo taken by Pablo Seward. Easter Island,
November 12, 2014.

In hand sight, the *umu tahu* truly had auspicious effects, as Antonia and I were able to do some amazing work with collaborators. The second person with whom we worked in the project was Zorobabel Fati, a knowledgeable elder with whom I had worked for my thesis research. Sadly, when we went to visit Zorobabel we learned that he had been diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. He was emaciated and pale, but had the willingness to participate in the project. Unlike our work with other collaborators, because of his health, Zorobabel could not go for an excursion around the island with us, but was willing for us to tape a conversation with him at home. Antonia will make the video of Zorobabel, which has important content, more dynamic by adding illustrations corresponding to the themes Zorobabel touches in the video. Zorobabel passed away about a week after we filmed the video with him. We were distraught; we had developed a close relationship with him. We feel honored to be able to transmit his last words to the community once we edit, share, and work with the video in communal settings during the next stage of the project.

A key issue with which I have been grappling throughout the project is the issue of language. When explaining the project to collaborators, I emphasize that unlike most projects done on the island, this one is for Rapanui people to produce themselves and participate in. Collaborators have pointed out that working in Spanish rather than Rapanui is inconsistent, therefore, with the project's goal. Though I have had to work in Spanish for most of the videos we have made given that understanding what people are saying is crucial for me to be able to tie the stories different people tell me, two of my most important collaborators told their stories in Rapanui. I hired a professional Rapanui translator to insert subtitles into the videos of these collaborators. Because of the expense involved in translating hours and hours of material into Spanish/ English, I will only be able to do this for a few videos. Although it would be ideal to have all videos in Rapanui, some of the children who the video targets do not speak Rapanui, and all children and adults alike speak Spanish.

Among the most interesting of the collaborators with whom I have worked is art teacher Petero Huke. So far, Antonia and I have produced two videos with Petero. The first video involved Petero showing us and talking about petroglyphs that some 7 years ago he asked his students to make as an assignment. This event stirred controversy in the academic world after Georgia Lee, renowned for her work on petroglyphs, harshly criticized Petero in an article, stating that he had no right to modify the landscape. In the video, Petero talks about cultural patrimony, positing his own view of Rapa Nui as a sacred landscape that must be in constant transformation by Rapanui people against the view of people like Lee who believe that the island, rather, belongs to humanity in general and must be therefore left untouched. The second video with Petero involves exploring the ruins of the leper colony, where he lived as a child and learned valuable stories from elderly Rapanui who were diagnosed with leprosy at the time:



Figure 3. Photo of Petero talking about the ruins of the leper colony. Photo taken by Pablo Seward. Easter Island, November 22, 2014.

Another interesting instance of the work we have done so far is recollecting trash from the coast. This trash comes from the Great Pacific Garbage Island. The goal of the project is to follow case stories that reveal a wider problem for the island. If Petero's conversation of petroglyphs as a case relates to the wider problem of patrimony and heritage, the case of trash arriving to Rapa Nui's coast (which we covered with Petero's sister, Piru Huke) relates to the wider problem of Rapa Nui as an island in a globalized world: a fragile, isolated place that nonetheless shares the same ecosystem and economy as the rest of the world. I was amazed by the amount of trash (mostly plastic) that I could recover from one specific place in the coast with only one-hour's worth of work:



Figure 4. Photo showing the amount of garbage Pablo collected after one hour of lifting rocks and finding plastic in the coast. Photo taken by Pablo Seward. Easter Island, November 17, 2014.

Though my intention originally was to send a video along with this letter-home, Internet in Easter Island is too slow for me to upload the footage. However, Antonia and I have already prepared a teaser (a longer version of something like a trailer) summarizing the different people we have worked with and videos we have made so far. I will be sending a re-edited version of this teaser for my December letter home.

Part of the project that may have changed as a result of the conversations I have had with Rapanui people on the island is the use of a book as medium. Producing a book, I was told, might detract the project from its purpose. My collaborators have suggested creating an online platform instead. At this point, I am still not sure about the best medium through which to communicate the work we have done. If we end up using an

online platform, I would be using digital spaces that would work outside the space of video to transmit the text the book was previously going to transmit. Though Internet is increasingly accessible in the island, it is still very slow. As such, if I decide to pursue creating a webpage for the project, we would copy the content in the platform into a DVD and then distribute the DVD to the people who participated in the project, as well as to public institutions (like the local library and schools). I foresee that a couple years from now Internet will be fully immersed into the Rapanui society, so the webpage would gain more importance with the older the material becomes.

During December I will continue working with the people I have already worked with and start working with new people I have met. I will be returning to Chile on December 20th to spend Christmas with my family in Santiago. By then, I hope to have lots of material to edit, which includes not only video editing but also content-editing. I plan to create Excel templates coding each of the videos we made for common themes. There will be much creative work involved trying to find the best logic to the narratives I have collected. The plan is to return to Easter Island in mid-February to produce the edited material in collaboration with Rapanui people in public workshops, as well as to fill gaps in the material collected. From February 1 to February 15, there will be a massive cultural festival on the island. The plan is to arrive to the island right after the festival finishes, when most of our collaborators will again have the time to continue working with us.

Thank you, as always, for all of your support!

Pablo